

CONCEPTU' L INTEGR' TION ' ND FILM MUSIC ' N' LYSIS

77

Juan Chattah

Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia

A large number of scholarly writings about film music investigate interactions between the music's structure and the visual or narrative dimensions. Engaging with the phenomenology of music, these studies explore parallels between visual or narrative events in a film and correspondences in the music's melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, metric, and/or formal parameters. Little attention, however, has been paid to the analytical study of relationships between the music's connotations and the narrative.

Models conceived for the study of metaphor prove valuable for the analysis of film music. In this essay I borrow the Conceptual Integration Network model developed by cognitive psychologists Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier (2002) to formalize and help explain: 1) Correlations between the music's connotations and the film's narrative, 2) correlations between the lyrics of popular songs and the film's narrative, and 3) conflict between the music's connotations and the film's narrative that triggers interpretations of irony.

Throughout the essay reference to specific timings of the selected examples is provided in the following format [hour: minute: second—hour: minute: second].

Metaphor

Ibert Katz (1998: 3) defines metaphor as “an explicit or implicit comparison, which is literally false” and suggests that a metaphorical reading occurs when “a predicate violates ‘literal’ category membership.” For example, in the metaphor “My car is a lemon”, the subject “my car” is not a member of the “lemon” category. If this sentence were literally true (as in “My car is a Ford”), it would be a categorization instead of a comparison. For example, in the metaphor “My car is a lemon”, the subject “my car” is not a member of the “lemon” category. “My car is a Toyota”,¹ on the other hand, is literally true, therefore being a categorization rather than a comparison.²

Reference to context is a key feature. Contextual clues can transform a liter-

¹To some extent this phrase could be regarded as a metonymy standing for “My car is a Toyota product”.

²Sam Glucksberg and Boaz Keysar (1990: 12) believe that absence of (obvious) category membership does not necessarily transform an utterance into a metaphorical

77. "Integrating Film Music 'analysis'" *Juan Chattah*

ally true utterance into a metaphor and vice versa.³ For example, the utterance "John is a tiger" at first seems a metaphor that correlates the conceptual domains of "John" and "tiger", with a possible implication of John's wild or vicious behavior. In the context of college football, and more specifically at LSU, this apparently literally false comparison would be regarded as a literally true categorization. Namely, that John either belongs to or roots for the Tigers' team.

The understanding of metaphors relies on our ability to foreground similarities between (at least) two domains. In the metaphor "Nancy is a rose" for example, we project relevant features from one domain to another (see Figure 1). The study of metaphor has grown from its origin in linguistics onto the field

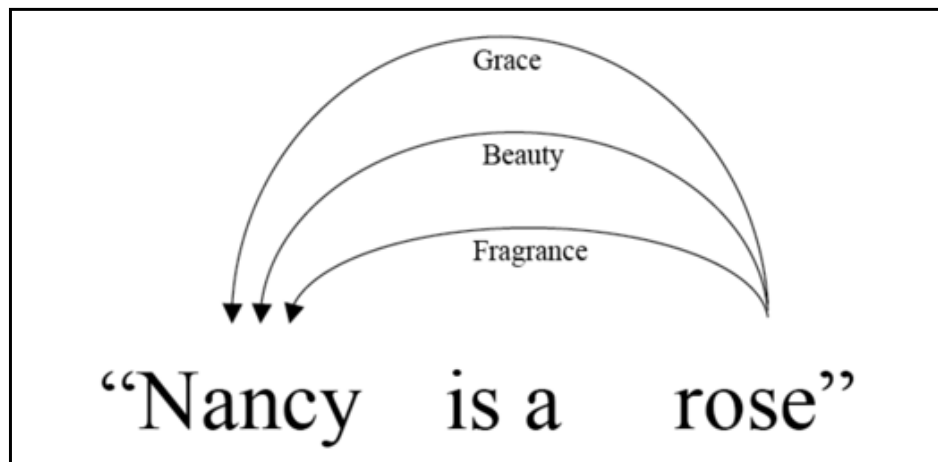


Figure 1. Projections between domains in metaphors.

of perception and cognition. Metaphors are no longer exclusively linguistic, but rather conceptual and socio-cultural phenomena, possible to be expressed through numerous sensory modalities. A cross-perceptual metaphor involves different perceptual fields (or sensory modalities).

Conceptual Integration Networks

Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's (2002) Conceptual Integration Networks, also known as Conceptual Blending theory, helps explain the cognitive process through which one derives meaning from metaphors. Conceptual integration entails a mental representation based on a four-space model: two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space (see Figure 2). These men-

comparison: "Metaphoric comparisons involve items at different category levels, and so they are implicit categorization statements. Recognizing a comparison as metaphorical involves the recognition that the comparison is intended as an implicit categorization."

³ Since some metaphors rely on features that might not be objectively present in the source domain, such as socio-cultural associations, the understanding of metaphors requires a pragmatic consideration of their usage (i.e. context).

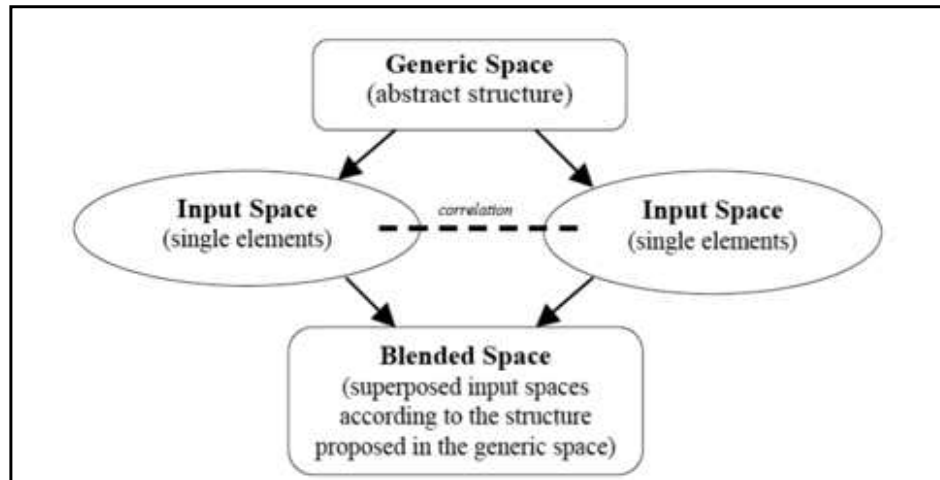


Figure 2. *Conceptual Integration Network model.*

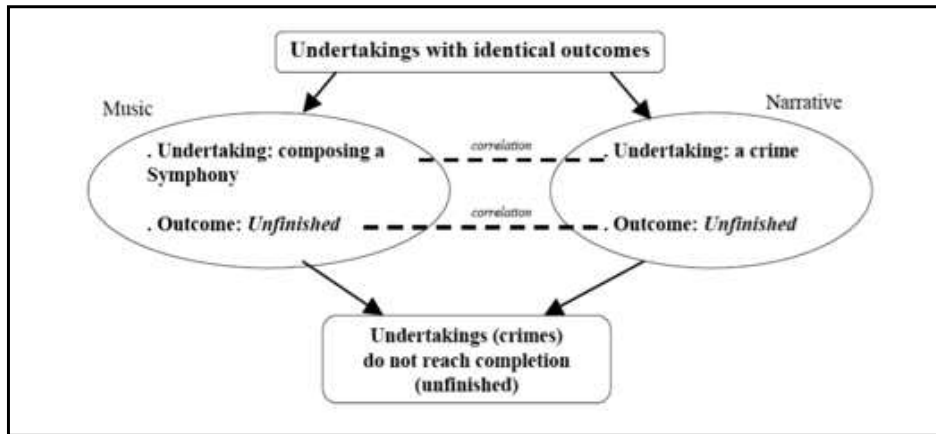
tal spaces are created by projections among conceptual domains, temporarily capturing information as our thoughts unfold. Each element included in one input space maps onto a corresponding element in the other input space. The generic space posits the abstract structure that relates the elements of the input spaces. And the blended space results from superposing both input spaces according to the structure proposed in the generic space.

Metaphor and Film Music

Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* is a science fiction action thriller. The plot revolves around a pre-crime unit in the police force. With the aid of three psychics, the police are able to see violent crimes before they occur. The pre-crime unit gathers information from visuals transmitted by the psychics, in order to stop crimes before they are committed. A scene early in the film shows Tom Cruise, as the chief of the pre-crime unit, in charge of manipulating the visuals transmitted by the pre-cogs with the purpose of finding information that would reveal the place and time of a crime. To accompany his quasi-conducting movements in front of a flat screen panel, Tom Cruise introduces Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* in an audio device, which (as its name implies) was never completed by the composer. See clip at [0:38:10 - 0:40:00].

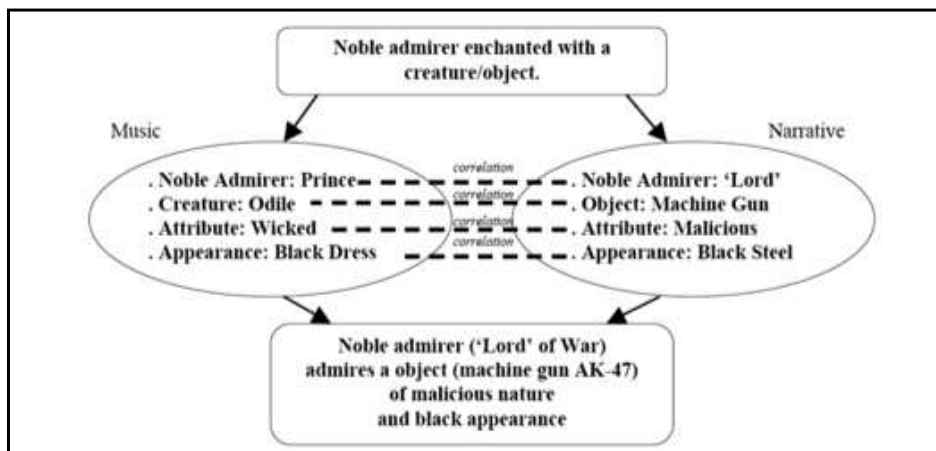
Introducing Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* creates a metaphor that draws a parallel between the music and the narrative (see Figure 3). The generic space specifies the abstract structure that promotes a blend of cognitive dimensions: undertakings with identical outcomes. The musical input space contains two elements: an undertaking (a symphony), and the outcome (unfinished). Each of these elements has a counterpart in a narrative input space: an undertaking (a crime), and the outcome (unfinished). The blended space results from superimposing both input spaces according to the structure proposed in the generic space, thus realizing the link between the music's connotations with the plot: crimes will not reach completion.

77. "Integrating Film Music ' analysis" ♡ Juan Chattah

Figure 3. CIN for *Minority Report*.

Lord of War tells the story of Yuri Orlov (played by Nicholas Cage), a smuggler supplying illegal weapons during the Cold War. Halfway through the film, Yuri Orlov is shown admiring an AK-47, while Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* plays in the background. See clip at [00:44:45 – 00:45:45]. The correlations between the narrative and the music in this scene go beyond the Russian origin of both the machine gun and the musical piece. In Tchaikovsky's ballet, Prince Siegfried falls in love with Odette, a girl trapped in the body of a white beautiful swan because of the spell of an evil magician. In order to break the spell, Siegfried needs to swear his love to Odette. But, one night at the ball in the castle, the magician appears in disguise, looking exactly like Odette but dressed in black and under the name of Odile. Deluded by the similarity, Siegfried swears eternal love to the magician. The magician rejoices in his victory and disappears.

The generic space contains the abstract structure that promotes the blend: a noble admirer enchanted with a creature/object (see Figure 4). The musical input space includes: the noble admirer (the prince), the creature admired (Odile), her attribute (wicked), and her appearance (dressed in black). Each of these elements has a counterpart in the narrative input space: the noble admirer-

Figure 4. CIN for *Lord of War*.

er (Lord of War), the object admired (‘ K-47), its attribute (malicious), and its appearance (made of black steel). Superimposing both input spaces according to the structure proposed in the generic space helps realize the link between the music’s connotations and the plot: Lord of War admires the malicious, made of black steel, ‘ K-47 machine gun.

It is not incidental a piece of music titled *Sonata for a Good Man* is an important plot point in the political thriller *The Lives of Others*. Sonata form provides the composer a design with dramatic potential; it contains the three sections characteristic of rhetorical structures: exposition, development, and recapitulation (see Figure 5). During the exposition two contrasting themes are

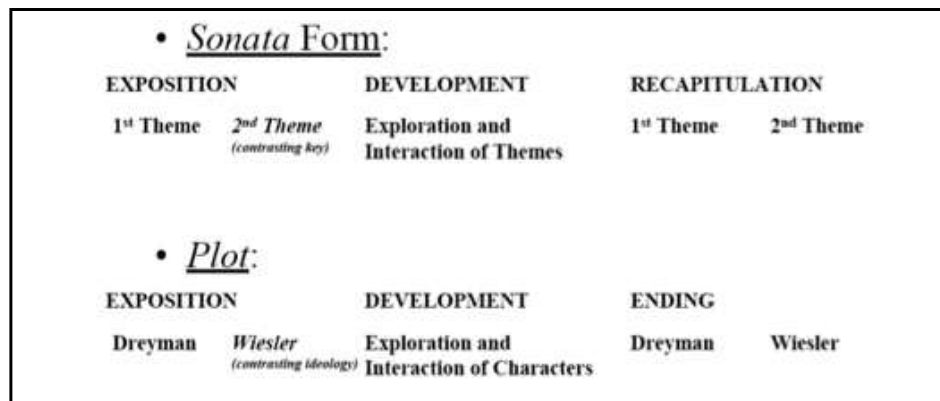


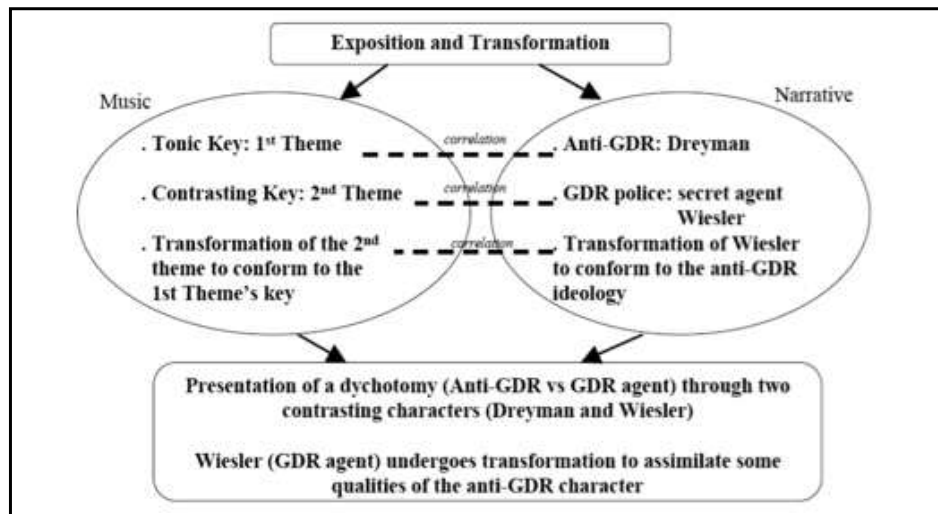
Figure 5. Correlation between Sonata form and plot in *The Lives of Others*.

presented: the first theme in the home key, and the second theme in a contrasting key. During the development these two themes are explored and musically confronted. At the recapitulation, both themes are once more presented; but, the second theme (now in the home key) has been transformed to conform to, and to some extent assimilate, the qualities of the first theme.

The plot from *The Lives of Others* revolves around two ideologies represented in two main characters: the anti-GDR writer Georg Dreyman, and GDR’s secret police officer Hauptman Wiesler. A scene early in the film shows Dreyman and his fiancé Christa sharing some intimate moments after Dreyman’s birthday party. Dreyman briefly looks at one of the presents, a score of the *Sonata for a Good Man*; but they are not aware, however, that Wiesler, the GDR officer, is keeping them under close surveillance. See clip at [00:34:00–00:35:00]. Throughout the film, Wiesler’s character slowly changes while observing the day-to-day life of Dreyman and the anti-GDR group. He begins to be drawn into their world, thus putting his ideologies into question. See clip at [00:52:50 – 00:54:15]. The last scene of the film, shows a radically changed Wiesler. He no longer works as a secret agent, and no longer shares the GDR’s ideology. Moreover, the dedication of Dreyman’s novel to Wiesler, suggests a complete disengagement from his previous persona. See clip at [02:11:15–02:12:20].

The abstract structure that promotes the blend is a common trait in both the narrative and the music: exposition and transformation (see Figure 6). The music input space contains: two contrasting themes, with a later transformation

77. "Integrating Film Music ' analysis" © Juan Chattah

Figure 6. CIN for *The Lives of Others*.

of the second theme to conform to the first theme's key. Correspondingly, the narrative input space contains: two characters with contrasting ideologies, and a subsequent transformation of the second character. The blend highlights the similarities between both input spaces; namely the presentation of a dichotomy (an anti-GDR character and a GDR agent) with a subsequent transformation of one of the elements (the GDR agent undergoes transformation to conform to the anti-GDR ideology).

The Compilation Score

The compilation score so common in today's movies emerged as a marketing strategy and opened a new dimension in the general conception of film music. Recent compilations enhance the film's story through innovative placement of songs.

During the 80's, the financially advantageous idea of selling a movie and a soundtrack to the public promoted the incorporation of popular songs as part of the non-diegetic (rather than diegetic) soundtrack. David Bell (1994: 66) states that songs are "being purchased and placed in films, not for artistic reasons, but because they might sell more soundtrack records/CDs. It's now the point where film-soundtrack CDs that include songs which never appeared in the film are manufactured and sold! The power of the record companies within the film industry has become enormous; it's a bit of the tail wagging the dog."

The trend started by placing a catchy feature song either at the beginning or at the end of the film; often these songs bore little or no relation to the events that took place during the film. Irving Bazelon (1975: 30) recognized this trend saying that "it does not seem to matter that the theme tunes have little relevance to the film's dramatic context...Usually placed at the beginning as a title song but occasionally at the end...the songs cash in on today's fast changing market, ostensibly giving pictures with a gilt-edged frame of catchiness."

Semiotics 2008 ❖ XXI. Movies, Music, Meaning

Recent films that incorporate compilation scores are largely directed at the teen market. The young public is the main consumer of pop/rock recordings, and demographic studies show that people between the ages of 15 and 19 spend more money on recordings than any other five-year age group.⁴ Accordingly, Richard Davis (1999: 196) mentions that “it is no wonder that producers are all hopping on the soundtrack bandwagon, hoping to generate both profit and publicity for their films through the use of songs.”

Criticism has been directed not only at the obvious financial motivations of a compilation score, but also at its artistic function within the film. In this respect, David Bell (1994: 67) states that “the incorrect use of songs endangers the cohesiveness of film art. Instead of a two-hour dramatic statement, motion pictures often become bits of plot interspersed between MTV-like music videos.”

In *Fools Rush In*, however, several songs from different styles, eras, and even in different languages, are placed strategically to match the visuals as well as the plot. The soundtrack comments on the narrative events by drawing on associations created by its lyrics, title, or connotations. Alex, a New York nightclub designer played by Matthew Perry, meets Isabel, a beautiful young Mexican photographer played by Selma Hayek. Their one-night stand results in the unexpected pregnancy of Isabel. After three months, Isabel reappears and tells Alex the news, to which he does not respond well. A scene early in the film shows Isabel angry driving away in a huff. See clip at [0:20:20 - 0:21:20]. As Alex starts to follow her, the song *Para Donde Vas?* [Where Are You Going?] begins playing. The song *Para Donde Vas?* portrays Alex’s uncertainty of where Isabel is going. This CIN illustrates how the lyrics speak Alex’s mind as he follows Isabel: “Para donde vas, muchacha” might be read as “Where are you going, Isabel” (see Figure 7). They decide to marry, but the in-laws do not

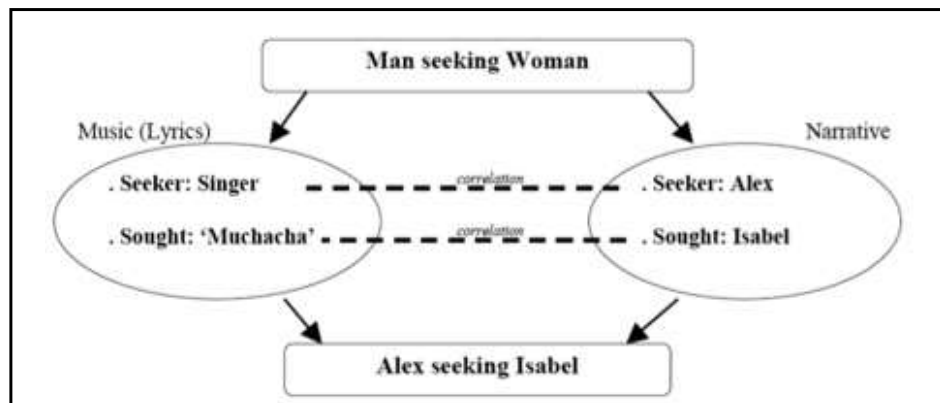


Figure 7. CIN for *Fools Rush In*.

agree to the plan. Both families meet during a very hot afternoon, and Alex’s parents wind up with terrible sunburns. See clip at [1:04:10-1:04:30]. The lyrics of *Fever* “Fever, ‘til you sizzle. What a lovely way to burn...” map onto the visuals and the narrative, emphasizing the event of the characters getting

⁴ For a complete demographic report see Baskerville (2001: 304-305).

77. “Integrating Film Music ‘analysis’” © Juan Chattah

sunburned (see Figure 8).

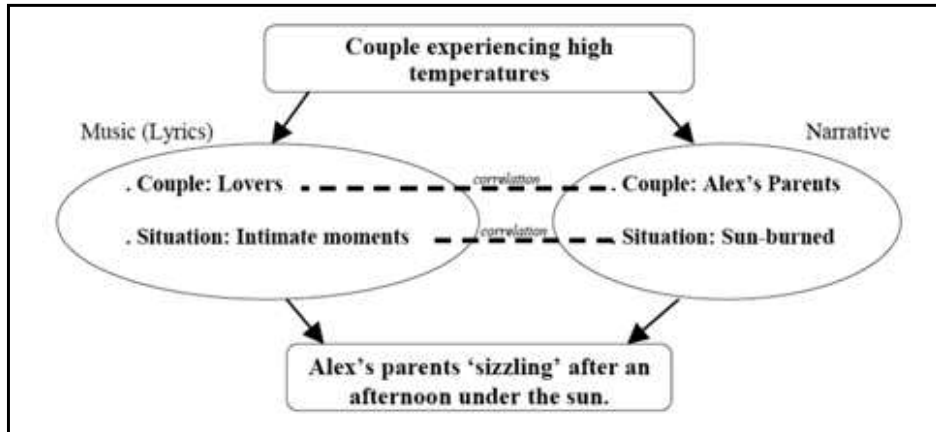


Figure 8. CIN for *Fools Rush In*.

In the foregoing examples, there is a direct correlation between the music’s lyrics and the events in the narrative. However, when song lyrics are not included in a soundtrack, the link between the songs and the narrative relies upon the audience’s prior knowledge. During a weekly family gathering, Isabel’s old boyfriend confronts Alex. After a tense moment, Isabel’s old boyfriend asks the Mariachis to resume playing; they play *Linda Guerita* but do not sing the lyrics. See clip at [0:27:30 - 0:28:20]. CIN illustrates the correlation between the music’s connotations and the narrative: The absent lyrics of the song *Linda Guerita*: “Por el yo te perdí...solo en mis sue_os estas en mi” [Because of him I lost you...now you are only in my dreams], reflect Isabel’s former boyfriend’s feelings (see Figure 9). Even the very absence of the lyrics echoes the sense of loss in Isabel’s ex-boyfriend.

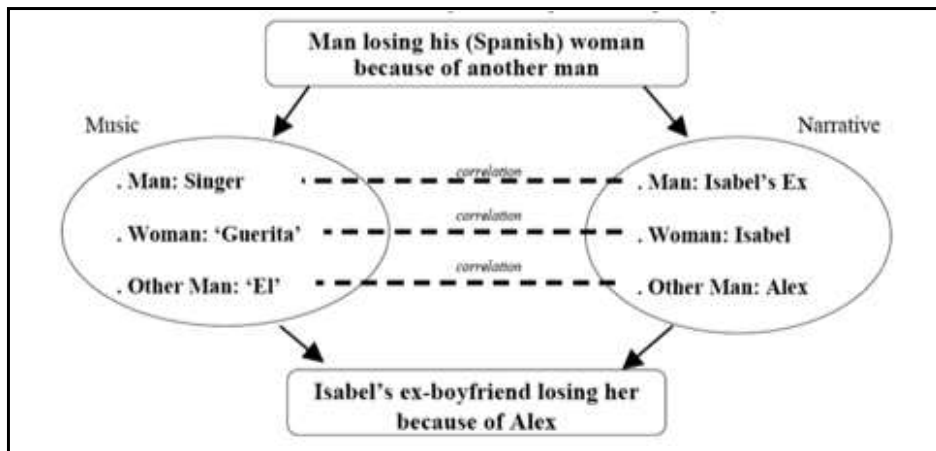


Figure 9. CIN for *Fools Rush In*.

Irony

Understood in linguistic terms, irony constitutes a “highlighting strategy

Semiotics 2008 ❖ XXI. Movies, Music, Meaning

based on the use of words to convey a meaning contrary to their literal sense” (Danesi and Perron 1999: 7). Contextual expectations circumscribe the use of irony in film music to certain genres. Roger Kreuz (1996: 30) mentions that “we might expect ironic statements in a story by Kafka, but not on the front page of the newsessay.” Similarly, we are more likely to encounter ironic correlations in comedies, than in dramas or science fiction films. A modified version of the CIN model helps illustrate the cognitive process that triggers the understanding of irony. While the original model focuses solely on cross-domain correlations and similarity, irony would involve projections based on incongruity or opposition (see Figure 10).

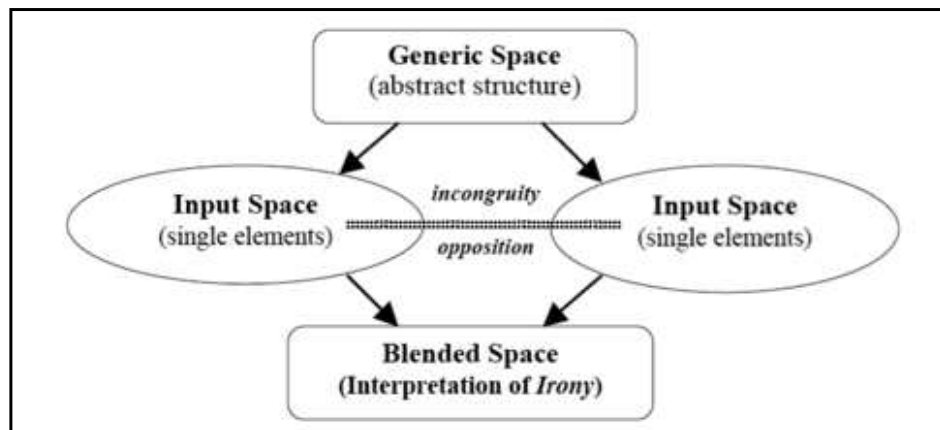
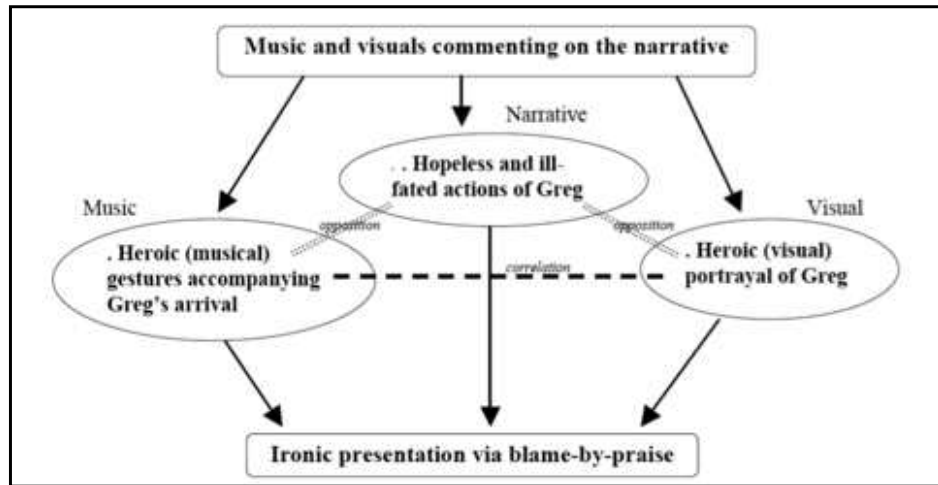


Figure 10. Modified CIN adapted to the presentation of irony.

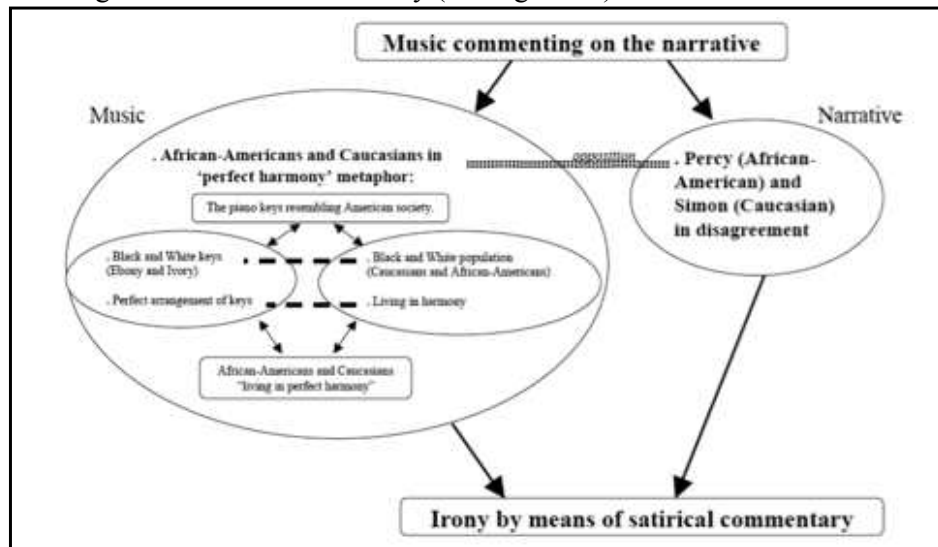
Meet the Parents is a comedy that revolves around Greg meeting his prospective in-laws for the first time. Jack, the disliking father-in-law, has one precious possession: his cat. During a weekend, the cat gets lost. To gain Jack’s respect, Greg disguises a newly acquired cat by painting a fake white tail, and pretends to have found the lost cat. A scene in the film shows Greg arriving with the disguised cat. The majestic flair of the music (composed by Randy Newman), with its “heroic march” harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic gestures corresponds with the visuals of Greg as determined and strong-minded (through slow-motion and a half smile). See clip at [1:13:10 - 1:13:50]. The audience is thus exposed to contradicting representations of Greg: the plot clearly presents Greg as hopeless and ill-fated, while the music and the visuals portray Greg as a hero. The interpretation of irony stems from the incongruity presented among conceptual domains highlighting Greg’s non-heroic actions, by means of blame-by-praise (see Figure 11). This example (arguably) incorporates hyperbole; we can perceive hyperbole as the necessary overstatement of the epic genre to maximize its identification.

Guess Who is a romantic comedy that touches upon racial issues. Simon, a white young man, will marry the daughter of Percy and Marilyn, a successful and protective African-American couple. After a heated discussion, Percy decides that Simon should stay in a hotel. Unfortunately (for Percy), the hotel is fully booked, so they drive back home. As they enter the car, Percy turns the radio on.

77. "Integrating Film Music Analysis" ♡ Juan Chattah

Figure 11. CIN illustrating irony in *Meet the Parents*.

The ending of the song *Ebony and Ivory*, performed by Paul McCartney & Stevie Wonder, starts sounding, and the lyrics “Ebony, ivory, living in perfect harmony” make both Simon and Percy quite uneasy. See clip at [0:29:28 - 0:30:00]. The lyrics of the song metaphorically correlate the black and white keys of a piano, with the African-American and Caucasian population, proposing that both live in perfect harmony. The narrative, however, contradicts this proposition. This conflict between the musical and the narrative conceptual domains points to the lack of harmony between Simon and Percy, thus ironically reversing the meaning of the song via a satirical commentary (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. CIN illustrating irony in *Guess Who?*

Stereotyped characters commonly share musical heritage and taste; but not in the comedy *White Chicks*. See clip at [00:57:50 – 00:59:10]. A CIN illustrates how the incongruity between the audience’s expectations regarding the

Semiotics 2008 ❖ XXI. Movies, Music, Meaning

character's musical taste, and the character's reaction to the music, causes an ironic reversal of character type (see Figure 13).

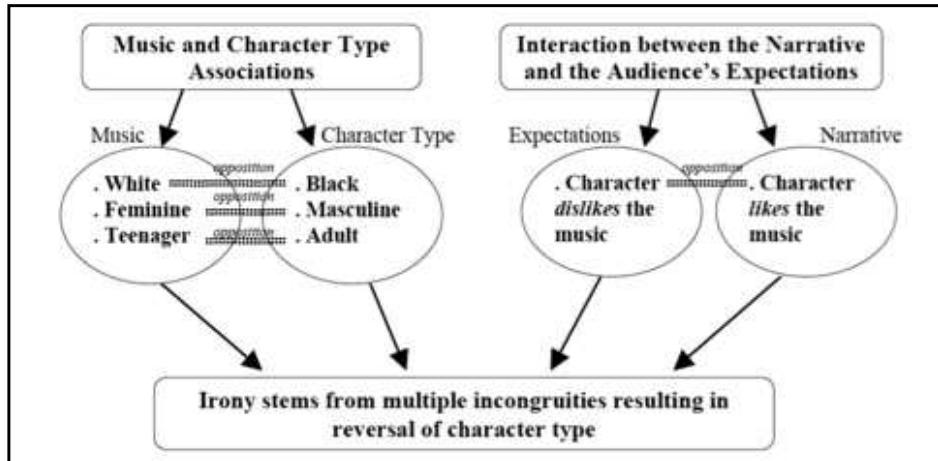


Figure 13. CIN illustrating irony in *White Chicks*.

The above examples of irony in film comply with Roger Kreuz's (1996: 33) perspective that "positive evaluations of negative situations are perceived as ironic, and negative evaluations of positive situations are typically not, unless there is a clear victim of the remark." This supports some researchers' proposition that ironic statements are echoes of positive cultural norms.⁵ Kreuz (1996: 32) remarks that "when real life does not reflect our expectations, we can ironically invoke these norms."

Cross-perceptual metaphorical processes are at play when a segment of a film is accompanied by music that carries a prominent cultural baggage, or music whose lyrics explicitly (or implicitly) contain clues for understanding the film. This essay proposed a framework to rigorously describe and examine correlations between the music's connotations and the film's visuals or narrative. I employed Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual integration networks model to analyze cases where the socio-cultural associations (rather than constituent parameters) of both the source and the target domains blend to generate meaning. The analyses revealed (and helped reconstruct) the cognitive process that induce aesthetic interpretations about music's place within film. I also proposed a modified version of Fauconnier and Turner's model to highlight incongruity between conceptual domains to describe irony.

References

- ALTMAN, Rick.
2000. *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute Publishing).
BASKERVILLE, David.
2001. *Music Business Handbook* (California: Sage Publications).

⁵ See Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989: 374-386) and Sperber and Wilson (1981).

77. "Integrating Film Music Analysis" ❀ Juan Chattah

- BAZELON, Irwin.I
1975. *Knowing the Score* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company).
- BELL, David.
1994. *Getting the Best Score for your Film* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press).
- BELTON, John.
1994. *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill).
- DANESI, Marcel, and Paul PERRON.
1999. *Analyzing Cultures: An Introduction and Handbook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
- FAUCONNIER, Gilles, and Mark TURNER.
2002. *The way we think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books).
- FORCEVILLE, Charles.
1998. "Metaphor", *Encyclopedia of Semiotics* (Oxford University Press).
- GLUCKSBERG, Sam.
2001. *Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphor to Idioms* (Oxford University Press).
- GLUCKSBERG, Sam, and Boaz KEYSAR.
1990. "Understanding Metaphorical Comparisons: Beyond Similarity", *Psychological Review* 97.1, 3-18.
- KATZ, Albert.
1998. *Figurative Language and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- KATZ, Albert, and Jeffery MIO.
1996. *Metaphor: Implications and Applications* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).
- KOVECSES, Zoltan.
2002. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford University Press).
- KREUZ, Roger, and Sam GLUCKSBERG.
1989. "How to be Sarcastic: The Echoic Remainder Theory of Verbal Irony", *Journal of Experiential Psychology: General* 118, 374-386.
- KREUZ, Roger, and Richard ROBERTS.
1993. "On Satire and Parody: The Importance of Being Ironic", *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 8.2.
1995. "Two Cues for Verbal Irony: Hyperbole and the Ironic Tone of Voice.", *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 10, 21-31.
- MARKS, Lawrence.
1982. "Synesthetic Perception and Poetic Metaphor", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 8.1, 15-23.
1989. "On Cross-Modal Similarity: Perceptual Structure of Pitch, Loudness, and Brightness", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 15.3, 586-602.
1996. "On Perceptual Metaphors", *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 11.1, 39-66.
- SHEINBERG, Esti.
2001. *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Dmitri Shostakovich* (Ashgate Publishing).
- ZBIKOWSKI, Lawrence M.
2002. *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press).